

1866-1874

Reconstruction: Louisiana Attempts to Rebuild

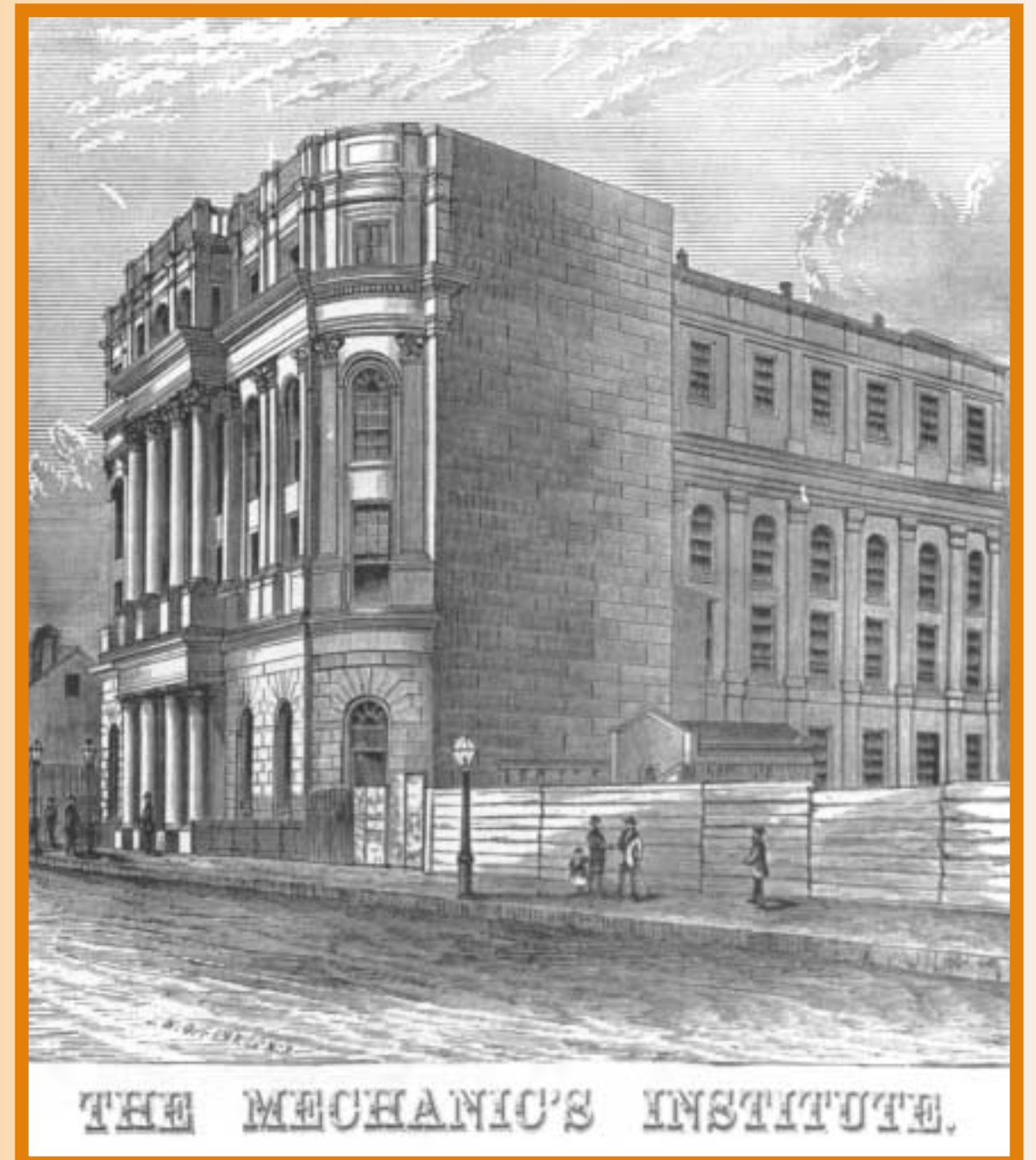
“A Legislature representing the entire State of Louisiana is now convened for the first time since the breaking out of the war. We have had sectional, antagonistic, hole-and-corner Legislatures, year after year, which hesitated not to assume all the prerogatives of such bodies . . . but none in which the entire State was represented . . . The Legislature (is) now in session at the Mechanics Institute.”

Editorial, New Orleans Times, 11/28/1865

The post-war Louisiana government faced numerous challenges, among them finding an appropriate building in which to govern. The 1864 Constitution had empowered the government to build a new state house, but no plans were ever proposed. Instead, the government leased the **Mechanics Institute**. The Institute proved unsatisfactory, even after years of extensive repair. At one point, the government leased nearby buildings just so politicians could work.

Had the legislature chosen a better building, the capital might have remained in New Orleans. Motivated by the Institute's worsening condition, several politicians proposed moving the capitol out of New Orleans. This proposal was temporarily put

Mechanic's Institute

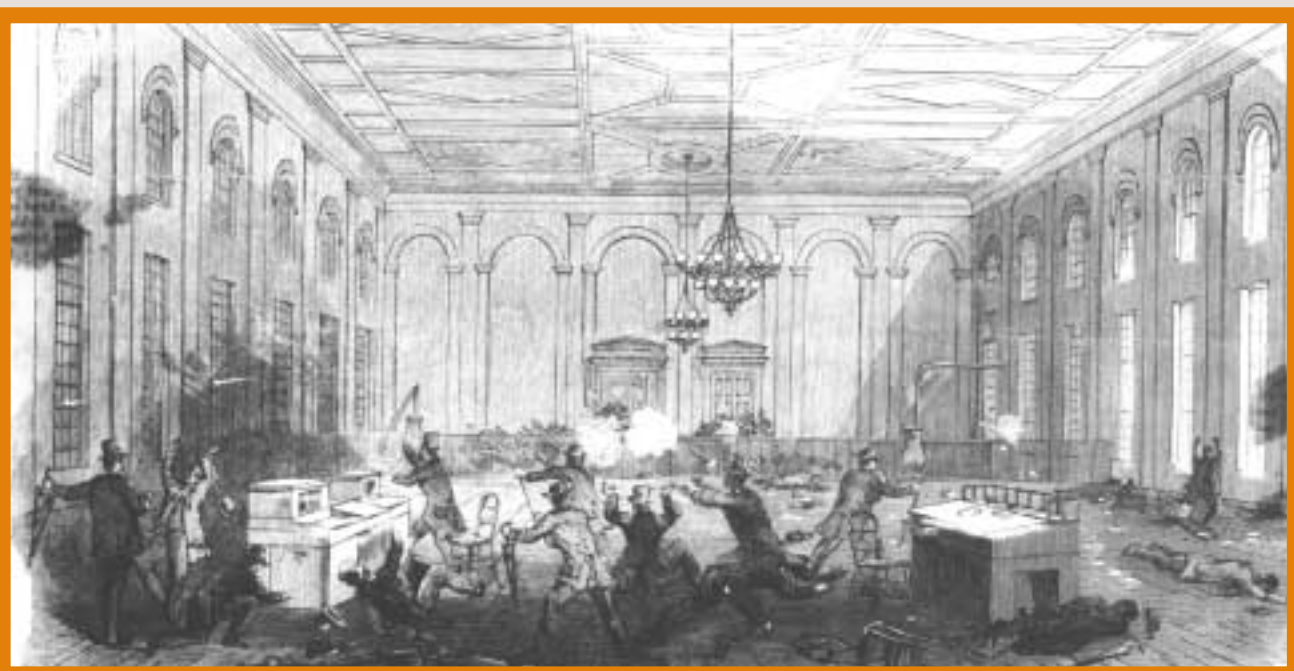


Governors serving here were James M. Wells, Benjamin F. Flanders, Joshua Baker, Henry C. Warmoth, P.B.S. Pinchback, and William P. Kellogg.

aside when the legislature discovered it could purchase the old **St Louis Hotel** for a reasonable price. The capital relocated there in 1874 to remain in New Orleans awhile longer.

Is That a Fact?

- The riot of 1866, which broke out at the Mechanics Institute, paved the way for Radical Reconstruction the following year.
- The state rented the Institute for \$8,000 per year, but still paid \$7,050 in 1865 and \$15,000 1867 for repairs.
- A year after the state government vacated the Mechanics Institute, the University of Louisiana (now Tulane University) purchased the building and renamed it Tulane Hall.
- P.B.S. Pinchback, who served here, has been Louisiana's only black governor.



Riot of 1866

1875-1881

Political Power Shifts: the Capital's Location is Reconsidered

“By act of 1875, the purchase of the State House was authorized and \$250,000 were appropriated.”

-H.D. Ogden, Attorney to Louisiana State Auditor,
regarding bond sales, 2/1/1878

The **St. Louis Hotel** was certainly the most luxurious state house to date. However, the end of Reconstruction in 1877 as well as shifts in political power set the stage for yet another move. Working to reverse the effects of



Legislators working in
St. Louis Hotel

Reconstruction, a post-Reconstruction Constitutional Convention approved a new state constitution in 1879. The new constitution required the capital leave New Orleans and that any later relocations be

approved by three-fourths of the legislature.

Once more, the government looked to Baton Rouge. Finding the burned shell of the former state capitol structurally sound, the legislature decided to renovate. They hired William Freret, a New Orleans architect, and in 1882, eighteen months after renovation began, the government moved permanently back to **Baton Rouge**.

St. Louis Hotel



William P. Kellogg, Francis R. Tillou Nicholls, Louis A. Wiltz, and Samuel D. McEnery served as Governors in the St. Louis Hotel

“We the undersigned citizens of Baton Rouge, believing . . . that our little city has fairly triumphed in the last election, and is rightfully the chosen capitol of this state, . . . We know that Baton Rouge was supported by a large majority of the parishes and we not only cannot afford, but will not permit our defeat by an unlawful construction by the commissioners of election in the returning offices. All we ask is a fair count and honest returns and this we intend to have.”

-Citizens of Baton Rouge,
petition to return Capitol to Baton Rouge, 1872

Is That a Fact?

- After it burned in 1841, the St. Louis Hotel was carefully rebuilt from the plans of its original architects—J.N.B. and Isadore DePouilly.
- The hotel contained murals by Dominique Canova, son of the well-known Italian sculptor Antonio Canova.
- Louisiana purchased the St. Louis Hotel for a modest \$250,000.
- The hotel was finally torn down after it was damaged by a hurricane in 1915.
- Today the Royal Orleans Hotel occupies the former site of the St. Louis Hotel. It's architecture is similar to the former state house.